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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KIFR](#) [CH](#) [IN](#)
SUBJECT: CHINA DISMISSES TIBET EXILE CONFERENCE, CONTACTS
REMAIN PESSIMISTIC ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR PROGRESS

REF: A. BEIJING 4231
[1](#)B. BEIJING 4196
[1](#)C. BEIJING 4168

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Classified By: Acting Political Section Chief
Ben Moeling. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Following last week's Tibet exiles conference in Dharamsala, Han Chinese contacts provided PolOffs with a pessimistic perspective on the environment for China's talks with the Dalai Lama's representatives, observing that Tibet is "not a priority" for Beijing and noting that the PRC has successfully "villainized" the Dalai Lama in China. Other interlocutors pointed to strategic obstacles to any softening in Beijing's attitude, citing the PRC leadership's concerns about Xinjiang separatism and Sino-Indian relations as factors contributing to China's hard line. Liberal contacts linked improvement in the Chinese Government's treatment of Tibet to progress on broader political reform in China. PRC official media dismissed the conference as a tactic for the Dalai Lama to solidify his power over Tibetan exiles and "threaten" China with independence, but a living Buddha in Qinghai told PolOff that pro-independence groups are, in fact, gaining influence among Tibetan exiles, asserting that the Tibetan Youth Congress will be able to "insert some of its policies" into the Dalai Lama's "Middle Way" approach. End Summary.

CHINA'S MEDIA: "DALAI LAMA SOLIDIFIES POWER"

[1](#)2. (U) Coverage in China of the recently concluded Tibetan exile meeting in Dharamsala, India was largely restricted to PRC newspapers that specialize in international affairs. The Global Times, a paper known for its nationalist views and run by the Party flagship newspaper People's Daily, ran a long article on the meeting November 24. The piece argued that the Dalai Lama used the conference primarily to solidify his own power over Tibetans in exile and to threaten to seek independence should talks continue to go nowhere. The International Herald Leader, operated by the official Xinhua News Agency, printed a similar article November 25 that quoted PRC Tibet experts and officials as saying the Dalai Lama promotes the "Middle Way" mainly because the international community would not support violence or any campaign for overt Tibetan independence. The Dalai Lama's offer to retire or semi-retire from politics, the Herald Leader reported, was a tactic to counter

pressure from the "pro-independence" Tibetan Youth Congress and other more radical Tibetans who remain frustrated by the lack of progress.

LIBERAL CHINESE PERSPECTIVE

¶13. (C) Though representing a minority view in China, liberal Embassy contacts were quite critical of the PRC Government's Tibet policy in recent conversations with PolOff, with some linking the Tibet situation to progress on human rights and political reform more broadly within China. For example, Qin Hui (protect), a liberal scholar at Tsinghua University and one of China's most prominent intellectuals, told PolOff November 24 that although the Tibetan exiles voted to stick with the Middle Way approach, China will continue to face "mounting difficulties" in Tibet, particularly if Beijing does not alter its current approach. The cases of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia demonstrate that economic growth and integration alone will not dampen Tibetan independence sentiment. Rather, progress depends on China's ability to improve human rights conditions, both in Tibet and throughout all of China. In fact, the PRC needs to "grant autonomy to every individual," Qin averred. Once Tibetans have more personal freedom, especially to worship without government interference, then the situation there can stabilize, Qin asserted, adding that respect for human rights and minority rights is one reason the United States does not have problems with separatism. Moreover, contrary to charges made by Tibetan exile groups, Qin argued, the Communist Party simply cannot use demographics to "pacify" the region. Han Chinese may be willing to go

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to high altitude areas for seasonal work, but they do not want to settle there permanently, Qin said.

¶14. (C) Mao Yushi (protect), Chairman of the Unirule Institute for Economics, one of China's few independent think tanks, separately echoed Qin Hui's comments in a November 25 meeting with PolOff. The main reason for the March 14 riots in Tibetan areas, Mao said, is the Communist Party's "old thinking," particularly its "hostility" toward religion and its "unequal treatment" of Tibetans and other minorities. Mao commented that he is personally not upset by the idea that minority groups in China would rather be independent. Throughout its history, Chinese provinces have sought independence from the central government. For example, as a child in Republican-era Guangxi Province, Mao said, he remembers using currency printed by the local warlord. "I say let Tibet and Taiwan be independent, it has no impact on my day-to-day life," Mao said, though he acknowledged his views are "hardly mainstream" among Han Chinese. Mao Yushi said that because the Dalai Lama is "so weak" compared to China, the PRC leadership does not approach negotiations with sincerity, merely dismissing everything the Tibetans say as "seeking independence." China's rulers view separatism in Muslim Xinjiang as a "much more immediate problem," which leads to unwillingness to compromise with the Dalai Lama for fear that this will create pressure to grant similar compromises for Xinjiang's Uighurs, Mao Yushi argued.

¶15. (C) Note: Qin and Mao's comments track with those of other liberal Embassy contacts in linking the lack of progress on human rights and political reform in China with Beijing's hard-line policies on Tibet. Speaking before the Tibetan exiles conference, dissident writer Wang Lixiong (protect) told PolOff November 7 that fundamental changes in China's Tibet policy will come only when China democratizes.

Separately, Professor Zhao Fasheng (protect) a "neo-Confucian" scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, on November 6 said the prospects for a more liberal PRC Tibet policy "died" at the same time the Tiananmen protests were crushed in 1989. Many of the leaders purged over Tiananmen, as well as Premier Hu Yaobang before that in 1987, were not only in favor of political reform but were also accused of being "too soft" on Tibet, Zhao asserted. Therefore, Zhao argued, a more "humane" Chinese approach on Tibet will not be feasible until political liberalization in China becomes a possibility.

WAITING FOR THE DALAI LAMA TO DIE

¶6. (C) Well-connected freelance journalist Chen Jieren (protect), while largely stating views more commonly held among the majority of Han Chinese, nevertheless echoed Mao Yushi's comments about the importance of Xinjiang in shaping Chinese leaders' approach to Tibet. Chen told PolOff November 24 that China was "not very concerned" with the Tibetan exiles conference but that the leadership is much more concerned with the potential for "serious unrest" in Xinjiang. From a security and sovereignty perspective, China really "has no choice" but to continue to take a tough line and maintain the "status quo" on Tibet, Chen argued. Given the option, most ethnic Tibetans in China would almost certainly choose independence, but China could never accept that outcome due to geostrategic considerations. "Tibetan independence would equal war with India," Chen declared, something Beijing simply will not allow. Though the door to dialogue with the Dalai Lama remains "open," Tibet is not a high priority issue for China. Chen agreed that China is waiting for the Dalai Lama to die in the hopes the Tibetan movement will weaken and splinter afterward. Moreover, Beijing would "be delighted" to see "more radical" Tibetan exiles opt for independence, as that would justify even harsher countermeasures by Beijing, Chen asserted.

¶7. (C) Wang Wen (protect), Opinion Editor at the Global Times newspaper, echoed Chen's pessimism about the future of talks with the Dalai Lama's representatives. China has never engaged the Dalai Lama seriously, Wang averred, noting that the talks are mostly "for show." If China really wanted to seek a settlement on Tibet, the Dalai Lama has already

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"said many of the right things," Wang stated. The problem is, China simply "does not believe" what the Dalai Lama says on issues such as independence and autonomy. There have been ample chances to reconcile, but China simply is not interested. China thus will wait for the Dalai Lama to die and then select his successor. Wang noted that the Dalai Lama has said publicly that he believes the Chinese Government is acting in bad faith in the talks, but that he still has faith in the "Chinese people." That faith is "misplaced," Wang declared, as the Dalai Lama has been successfully "villianized" in the eyes of most Chinese.

"UNGRATEFUL" TIBETANS

¶8. (C) Sharing sentiments held among many majority Han, China Reform Forum Deputy Secretary General Cao Huiyin (protect) argued to PolOff November 24 that the Tibet issue demonstrates how many Chinese minorities remain "ungrateful" for the vast investment China has made in their well-being. Not only has China received

"nothing" in return for its investment, but many minorities, including the Tibetans, have only become "more aggressive." In sum, China is "not worried" about the Tibetan exiles because they are outside the country and can be "as independent as they want to be." Cao's assistant, Dai Fengning (protect), while agreeing with Cao, nevertheless grimly stated that China will be faced with the Tibet issue for "decades" to come. "We have not solved the Tibet problem over the past 50 years, and we may have to deal with it for another 50," Dai concluded.

"TIBETANS WANT MORE INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT"

19. (C) Providing a perspective from the Tibetan community within China, Luosang Cicheng Pengcuo (strictly protect), a living Buddha at Lucang Monastery in Guinan, Qinghai Province, told PolOff on November 24 that, despite the outcome of the Dharamsala conference, "pro-independence" groups are gaining influence among Tibetan exiles. Although the exiles voted to maintain the "Middle Way," Pengcuo said the more radical Tibetan Youth Congress will be able to "insert some of its policies" into the Middle Way approach. Pengcuo, who said Tibetans in China have had difficulty obtaining detailed information about the conference, commented that ethnic Tibetans here want the international community, and especially the United States, to become "more directly involved" in the talks between China and the Dalai Lama's representatives. Progress will only be made if foreign countries are more willing to intervene, Pengcuo stated.

RANDT